Public Praxis Project

Student: Robert M. Dunstan
Professor: Dr. Mar Peter-Raoul
Course: World Views & Values (Philosophy 103)
Project Location: Salvation Army’s After-School Program

Introduction

I have been attending school in Poughkeepsie since 2008. Every year, I have wholeheartedly intended to involve myself in more volunteer programs within the community. Unfortunately, juggling a full-time job and a full-time school schedule has made it difficult for me to find time for community service. This praxis project has forced me to make time for volunteering and has given me a chance to give back to the community. Undoubtedly, I would like to continue volunteering even after I complete my project.

During my praxis project, I volunteered at the Salvation Army’s after-school program—an experience I most thoroughly enjoyed. Through their enthusiasm and excitement, the children I worked with have refreshed my perspective on life. Overwhelmed by the pressures of school, the anxiety of work and the stress resulting from family problems, this program has rejuvenated my childish enthusiasm I had lost sight of.

Please note that I begin each journal entry with a quotation, or a song excerpt, which has served as inspiration in my life. I often relate my life to music and utilize the encouraging words of others to build confidence in myself, my ability to succeed and my efforts to be a good person. I hope you, as the reader, find my entries to be just as interesting and inspirational as my experience was.
“It only takes one to make a difference. It takes a little to change. 
Let's start today for a new tomorrow”

-Meaning of Life, Hawk Nelson

I have been driving past the Salvation Army in Poughkeepsie on my way to school since 2008. However, my first visit to the office did not occur until October 14th, 2010 when I picked up an application for volunteering at the after-school program. The building was simply laid out with several small rectangular classrooms, a chapel, a kitchen, a few offices, and a gymnasium. The walls were littered with posters of Jesus embracing small children along with photos of both the staff and the clients of the Salvation Army.

After submitting my application, I met with Lieutenant Dwayne Barnes, the pastor of the organization, who asked me “Why are have you chosen to volunteer at the Salvation Army?” I told him that I was required to do a community service-based project for school, but that I also had a simple desire to help others. I also met with Julie and Ethel, the directors of the after-school program and was quickly admitted into the program.

At 2:30 in the afternoon, I walked into the art room and met another volunteer named Tony. Tony has been volunteering with the organization for just over ten years. I predict that I learn a lot from him. He seems to have a lot of skill in dealing with a large group of people. I also met one of the children in the art room, Evinson, who was the first to arrive. We briefly played basketball in the gymnasium. Afterward, we walked to the cafeteria where we found about twenty other kids sitting at the tables. I introduced myself to the group and was then joined by Tony. We sat with the children and asked them about their day. As Tony explained to them, “I would like to know how your day was. If I know that you had a bad day, then maybe I can talk to you or help you out. Everybody has bad days.” If there were any problems, he wanted to work with them towards a solution.
After snack-time in the cafeteria, we played several team-oriented games including dodge ball. The children tended to be rowdy, which resulted in a few minor bumps and bruises. Afterward, we gathered the students in the art room to do homework. Again, the children were a bit rowdy, but I was able to settle them down. I managed to get approximately ten of the kids to form a reading circle around me.

By 5:30pm, many of the parents arrived to pick up their children. Once everyone left, I stepped into Ethel's office. She asked me, as if expecting a negative response, “So... are you coming back?” I laughed and told her that I would be. She then told me that I was the first person to get the children to collectively read a book, which made me very happy.

I feel that I have been given an invaluable opportunity today. I have been given the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of these children. Ethel informed me that many of these children come from underprivileged and troubled backgrounds. For example, one girl was crying during dodge ball because her father was recently arrested for drug possession. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Justice found that a family environment involving crime was “associated with quicker transitions into the adult criminal justice system for both boys and girls” (Colman). This means that the girl, whose father is involved with drugs, is more likely to become involved in crime than a girl whose father is not. Furthermore, the United Nations stated in the 2003 World Youth Report that “dysfunctional family settings—characterized by conflict, inadequate parental control, weak internal linkages and integration, and premature autonomy—are closely associated with juvenile delinquency” (United). Again, this illustrates the substantial impact parents have on children. It will be nearly impossible to determine whether I have any long-term effects on the children since I will be working with them for a relatively short period of time. However, these students need a positive male role model in their lives. I can always hope that I will have a positive impact in their lives.
In his book, *Soul of a Citizen*, Paul Rogat Loeb quotes a Puerto Rican activist about his community involvement saying,

You learn things you never knew about yourself. You get pushed to your limits. You meet people who make you think and push you further. You don’t lose your identity. You begin to find out who you really are. I feel sad for people who will never have this experience (Loeb 28).

I hope that this experience allows me to learn more about who I really am as well as my capabilities. I may be faced with challenges, but I will do my best to overcome them. If Paul Farmer can make such an enormous impact on the people of Haiti, then I am determined that I can make a positive impact on the Poughkeepsie community and the children enrolled in the Salvation Army after-school program.

**Journal Entry #2**
**Log Date: Oct. 25th, 2010**

“I became a savior to some kids, I'll never meet  
Sent a check in the mail to buy them something to eat  
What will you do to make a difference, to make a change?  
What will you do to help someone along the way?  

Just a touch, a smile as you turn the other cheek  
Pray for your enemies, humble yourself, love's staring back at me  
In the midst of the most painful faces  
Angels show up in the strangest of places”

- *Looking for Angels*, Skillet

Today, I volunteered for the second time at the Salvation Army’s after-school Program. I felt very excited to interact with the children again. Already, I am beginning to find that not only am I making a positive impact on the children enrolled in the program, but the children are making a positive impact on me.

As I walked into the lobby area at 2:15 pm, I met with Tony, who was sitting with Evinson.
Evinson was running around the lobby. It is difficult for Tony and I to keep his attention for even the shortest amount of time. We remain calm and simply talk to Evinson in a normal tone of voice. Excitement or frustration will only encourage Evinson’s rambunctious behavior.

The other children burst through the front doors of the building at 2:30pm. They ran towards Tony and excitedly jumped to give him hugs and high fives. I was happily surprised that many of the children were just as eager to give me a hug.

After greeting the children, Tony and I moved them into the cafeteria for snack-time. While the children ate, Tony and I walked around the room asking each child about his, or her, day. As mentioned in my first log entry, we wanted to make sure that nothing was troubling the children. When asked, “How was your day,” each child replied with a simple, “Good.”

After the children finished their snacks, we all walked to the classroom for a quick group story-time. I read *Larry Learns to Listen*, by Karen Poth, which conveyed the importance of listening. This story was well-suited for the children, because many of them have issues with listening. I am trying to influence them with lessons in good behavior and cooperation, especially within social settings.

Although there are approximately fifteen children in the after-school program, I try to give each child as much one-on-one time as possible. I recognize that some of these children do not have supportive home environments and, therefore, would benefit from the individual attention I give to each of them. As I am starting to see, this is a learning process for both the children and me. The children are directly benefiting from the program, while I am indirectly benefiting by gaining new skills in social interaction and developing leadership qualities.

This experience has allowed me to do a significant amount of self-reflection. I believe I enjoy interacting with the children because, in the distant future, I am looking forward to becoming a father. My father abandoned my family approximately two years ago. However, even when my father was present in my life, he only served as a space filler. I did not have a substantial relationship with my
father. Ultimately, I am excited to build a relationship with the children enrolled in the after-school program and eventually my own children.

The Salvation Army’s after-school program is still in the developmental stages. In 1998, Johns Hopkins University conducted research on the effectiveness of after-school programs (Fashola). The research concluded that three major components are needed for a successful after-school program, including an academic component, a recreational component, and a cultural component (Fashola 49-50). Fashola states that an academic agenda that closely correlates with a school’s curriculum will ensure the most effectiveness (Fashola 49-50). She adds that

if the program is operated as a traditional after-school program at a community center, however, it is still possible to maintain some form of curricular alignment by providing homework assistance and activities that promote basic skills learning (Fashola 49-50).

This is exactly what the Salvation Army’s program is able to provide, because it is comprised of caring citizens who want to make a difference, but lacks professional teaching aids. The John Hopkins research report also states that the recreational component of a successful program will “develop social skills and values such as teamwork, good sportsmanship, coping strategies, and problem solving” (Fashola 49-50).

Although informal, Tony and I do our best to provide recreational opportunities with the specific intent of encouraging teamwork and cooperation skills. Last, Fashola elaborates that the cultural component of a successful program should provide the participants with “opportunities to develop important skills that are not taught in the classroom” (Fashola 50). Every Friday, the Salvation Army sponsors a Skate Night, which allows the children to interact in a social
setting as well as develop a new skill. Although the Salvation Army’s after-school program is not ideal, it serves as an excellent starting point for a potentially highly effective program. Ethel is working to gain several additional licenses and certifications that will expand the program’s abilities.

Commander Joseph Kony acted as the role model of the children of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Perhaps it is more appropriate to call Kony an anti-role model. Instead of providing a positive support system to develop the children’s character and confidence, his negative hostility promoted violence, which disrupted their psychological development (Batstone 112)

**Journal Entry #3**  
**Log Date: Nov. 1st, 2010**

“It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.”

-Tom Brokaw

I volunteered at the Salvation Army’s after-school program for the third time today. My experience today did not differ in format from the previous two days, but it served to reinforce what I have already learned—the children enrolled in this program need discipline and a supportive male role model.

After the usual snack-time and story-time the children completed their homework. Upon completion, many of the children wanted to play games and run around. As much as I wanted to run around and play games with the children, we had to conduct the program in a constructive manner. Many of the older children read books by themselves, while the younger children flocked to me for another group story. I felt overwhelmed by the numerous requests for books and the constant attention seeking from the children. Fortunately, some of the older children, such as Serenity, volunteered to help the younger students read a book.
The older children’s help with the younger children was beneficial for two reasons. First, it took some of the pressure off of me to entertain seven or eight children. By dividing them into smaller groups, the children received more individualized attention. Second, the leadership and teamwork demonstrated by the older children demonstrated that they themselves had become role models. Furthermore, it made me feel like I am making a difference in the lives of these children. Although I cannot claim sole responsibility for this progression, I felt that I was encouraging this behavior through example. Although I will probably not be able to witness any long-term effects, I feel that this daily progress suggests that I am making a positive impact.

Furthermore, on March 26th, 2009, over 100 students of Poughkeepsie gathered at a youth summit meeting, repeatedly telling Mayor John Tkazyik that “more programs for young people are needed to combat the recent wave of violence that has plagued Poughkeepsie” (Valkys). At the meeting, Somal’yia Forde stated that “a lot of the violence that’s happening comes from not having anything to do” (Valkys). Tavares Johnson continued “if somebody were actually there to be a role model, there wouldn’t be as much” (Valkys). Even though I may not be able to see the long-term results of my participation in the after-school program, I feel that this article has validated my concern with the youth of Poughkeepsie.

Not only do these types of programs benefit the children involved, but the volunteers as well. In *Soul of a Citizen*, Raul Rogat Loeb states that “individual growth is possible only through interaction with the human and natural world and through experiences that challenge us” (Loeb 27). Although the children of the Salvation Army are directly gaining the benefits of an after-school program, I am also building character, developing my leadership qualities and increasing my social interactions skills.
An easy life is no life at all.

Every challenge, obstacle and hardship that is overcome
adds meaning to living on this Earth

Today, I volunteered at the after-school program for the fourth time. I must admit, today was the most fun I have had in a long time. Today is Friday, which is recreation day at the after-school program. Around 2:30pm, we began the program with a snack and a group story, which was followed by time to work for those who had to do homework. Those who did not have homework either read a book or did a coloring book. Those who chose to color worked on a large coloring book together, which required the children to work as a team. I explained to them, “When you work together as a team, you can accomplish a lot of work in a short amount of time. When you work alone, it takes you a longer amount of time to finish the picture.” They all nodded in acknowledgment.

Before we headed to the gym, another volunteer, Ariel, asked the children trivia and spelling questions. The students had to write down the correct spelling of each word specified by Ariel. Then, the children gave me their papers to correct. For each correctly spelled word, the student received one point. Every child spelled at least one word, except for Evinson. He spelled no words correctly. I felt sympathetic towards him so I awarded him one point, even though he had no correct answers. The other children soon discovered that I assisted Evinson. They became upset because they did not receive the same assistance. I answered their objections by politely reminding them to “pay attention to your own scores.” Regardless, I knew that I should not have given Evinson the points, because it was unfair to the other children. Xavier took a particular offense to this. I felt horrible.

After the trivia games, we went to the gym to play basketball and kick-ball. This was a lot of fun. I do not normally play basketball, but I successfully made several half-court shots, which amazed
the children. Many of the children jumped, screamed and gave me high-fives in excitement, which gave me a feeling of acceptance. Now, I feel that I am a substantial influence in their lives. Furthermore, the excitement over the games distracted Xavier from the mishap during the spelling game, which alleviated some of the guilt I felt.

### Crime Rate of Dutchess County’s Municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Violent crime</th>
<th>Property crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beacon</td>
<td>14,545</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poughkeepsie</td>
<td>29,599</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>1,022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Fishkill Town</td>
<td>29,193</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Park Town</td>
<td>20,207</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine Plains Town</td>
<td>2,704</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poughkeepsie Town</td>
<td>43,027</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Hook Village</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhinebeck Village</td>
<td>3,046</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wappingers Falls Village</td>
<td>5,748</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millbrook Village</td>
<td>1,517</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Crime rates are based on the known crimes reported in the 2009 Uniform Crime Report by the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Not all existent municipalities in Dutchess County were listed in the report. Violent crime includes murder/non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. Property crime includes larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson. [http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/data/table_08_ny.html](http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/data/table_08_ny.html)

Of all the municipalities of Dutchess County listed in the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s 2009 Uniform Crime Report, Poughkeepsie has the highest crime rate. The youth of Poughkeepsie have a higher exposure to crime and, therefore, have a greater chance of becoming involved in criminal activity.
Log Date: Nov. 8th, 2010

“Wherever a man turns, he can find someone who needs him.”

-Albert Schweitzer

Today I volunteered for the fifth time at the Salvation Army. I must admit that I felt frustrated today. This was probably caused by my recent lack of sleep. I felt worn-out and tired by the end of the evening. Nonetheless, I did my best to have a positive attitude and interacted with the children in a very enthusiastic manner. Today I was faced with a few challenges, but that is part of the learning process.

Like the past several times I volunteered at the after-school program, the children ate their snacks, while Tony and I asked them about their days at school.

Unfortunately, I felt frustrated because another volunteer, Jasmine, seemed to be distracting the children from their homework. Jasmine seemed to be acting as more of a friend than a supportive role model. Jasmine gave her cell phone to one of the girls, which was playing loud music that distracted the other children. I had to tell the little girl to put the cell phone away three times before Jasmine took the phone back. Also, instead of correcting the situation, Jasmine laughed when one of the boys, Savior, crawled under a desk and started bothering Evinson. Last, a few of the children were teasing Evinson about his crush on another classmate, Serenity. Instead of telling the teasers to settle down, she joined in with the teasing. Instead of being helpful in supervising the children, Jasmine is giving me another person, herself, to supervise. I considered telling my supervisor, Ethel, about the situation and Jasmine’s lack of helpfulness, but I decided that it would be best not to potentially start an argument. If her behavior continues, I will bring it to Ethel’s attention. I suppose this is just another part of life’s learning process – dealing with uncooperative co-workers.

Overall, I feel that today was a good experience even though I felt frustrated. I am still doing my best to make a positive impact on the children, which is the most important part of this program.
try to offer the children a lesson in the form of a story or a series of questions whenever I can.

In David Batstone’s book, *Not For Sale*, Pierre Tami quotes a passage in the book of Corinthians which proclaims, “God helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help others who have all kinds of trouble, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God” (Batstone 30). In other words, one must use the assistance provided by God during times of hardship to help others experiencing hardships. This idea has a strong correlation between the Salvation Army after-school program and me. Two years ago, my father abruptly abandoned my family. With the help of my friends, my family and my faith in God, I overcame the frustrations and challenges brought on by my father’s decision to leave. Now, I would like to use my experience to help the children of the after-school program who are experiencing family issues.

I stumbled upon this picture while I was searching for a picture of the Salvation Army crest for the introduction page of this project. I found it particularly funny because I will most likely be volunteering as a Salvation Army bell-ringer during the holiday season. I can only hope
that my bell ringing arm stays intact.

In 2009, approximately 63.4 million American citizens, or 26.8% of the country’s population, volunteered within a non-profit organization on at least one occasion (Volunteering). This means that only one out of every four people donated time to a charitable cause without compensation for their efforts. However, in 2008, the Corporation for National and Community Service reported that 86% of high schools across the United States have policies that require each student to perform a certain amount of community service hours before graduation (Community). This requirement allows the students to become involved in the community, develop a more dynamic social life, build a resume, gain new working skills, and even gain references, which illustrates how beneficial community service is to everyone involved.

Journal Entry #6
Log Date: Nov. 12th, 2010

“Every day is a new day.
I’m thankful for every breath I take.
I won’t take it for granted,
So I learn from my mistakes.”

-Alive, P.O.D.

I volunteered at the after-school program for the sixth time today. It will be the last time that I record hours for volunteering, but it will definitely not be the last time I volunteer. This program and the people involved in it have made a significant impact in my life and I hope that I am having the same effect on them.

For the second time in a row, I was faced with a frustrating situation. One girl, whose name escapes me, was giving me a lot of trouble today. During story-time with Tony, she kept running in and out of the classroom. She refused to cooperate after I asked her to return to the room to sit quietly. I did
not feel comfortable picking her up to bring her back, so I did my best to coerce her back into the classroom. After many failed attempts, Ethel called her mother and explained the situation. The mother arranged to pick her up early. She continued to misbehave during recreation-time and refused to participate with the other children. It was very frustrating and made me realize that I still have a lot of learning to do.

Fortunately, the rest of the children were very well-behaved. Tony formed a circle with the children and had them roll a ball to one another within the circle. We used this simple game to gauge their ability to follow directions. If they could follow more simple instructions then we would allow them to play a more hectic game of basketball. After a few minutes of rolling the ball back and forth, we switched to basketball. I love playing basketball with the children, because they are so enthusiastic.

In *Not For Sale*, David Batstone states, “We no longer have to wonder how we might respond to our moment of truth. It is we who are on the stage, and we can change the winds of history with our actions. Future generations will look back and judge our choices and be inspired or disappointed,” which advocates activism when working towards a better future (Batstone 18). I would like to “change the winds of history” by making a positive impact in the lives of the youth of Poughkeepsie (Batstone 18). Although I am not addressing a problem as notable as the global slave trade like World Vision, I am still making a difference in the lives of others (Batstone). Even the simplest act of kindness has the potential to create an endless chain reaction of future kind acts.
Conclusion

On November 19th, the Salvation Army held a concluding holiday party and informal award ceremony for the children participating in the after-school program. During the celebration, the children and volunteers enjoyed an ice-cream party, a variety of games and an award ceremony, which complemented the unique characteristics of each child.

I really enjoyed this event because I started to see the cooperation of the staff and the children merge, which reinforced my belief in the importance of interactive after-school programs. On March 26th, 2009, Mayor John Tkazyik held a “youth summit,” during which over 100 students from the Poughkeepsie area addressed their concerns about violence in Poughkeepsie. Somal’ya Forde stated “A lot of the violence that’s happening comes from not having anything to do.” Tavares Johnson continued, “If somebody were actually there to be a role model, there wouldn’t be as much.” I feel that the students’ desire for constructive activities and positive role models validate my interest in after-school programs. As Edmund Bruke once said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [and women] do nothing” (Batstone 18). It is the responsibility of privileged individuals to assist those who are not as blessed. As citizens, we must play an active role in the development and improvement of our society.
Works Cited


Cover Page
http://synergyblog.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/hands-reaching2.jpg
Hands reaching out to one another

http://law.wm.edu/admissions/blog/images/giving_back_web.jpg
Hands holding up earth

Flat figures holding hands

http://pl.b5z.net/i/u/6053616/i/system_files/July_2009/Giving_Back%20logo.jpg
Giving back picture

http://www.wppl.org/teens/images/Volunteer.gif
Volunteer signs

http://www.mccscp.com/home/Images/Family_Services/Readiness_Community/volunteer_3D_people.png
Orange person volunteer

http://crossconnection.info/documents/School_20Kids.gif
Kids holding hands/shoulders

Kids doing arts and crafts

http://cdn.blisstree.com/files/114/2008/06/kids-handprints.jpg
Hand paint

http://www.morganga.org/Portals/0/fire%20dept/Volunteers.jpg
Hands in air

Dunstan 1
http://www.salvationarmyoc.org/images/crest.gif
Salvation Army Crest

Dunstan 8
http://www.pcsd.k12.ny.us/gzinsley/Saturday%20September.gif
pok hs crest

Dunstan 12
http://www.cartoonstock.com/newscartoons/cartoonists/mba/lowres/mban241l.jpg
bell ringer